

Back to Basics Respect Act

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here today. I am honored in your faith and trust in my abilities to serve as the next President of our Florida Senate. I would like to take a few moments and share my primary legislative project for our upcoming session.

For hundreds of years, women have been held to different standards. Women have fought for suffrage, property rights, equal employment opportunities and pay on a global scale. Women in high positions of power are often scrutinized. The amazing Mary R. Grizzle, “Dean of the Legislature” and Florida Hall of Fame inductee, advocated for the rights of women in our great state. Serving in both our Florida House of Representatives and Senate, Mrs. Grizzle saw it as her duty to provide for women just like her. She introduced and passed the “Married Women Property Rights Act” in 1970, which allowed married women in Florida the right to own property solely in their names. She sponsored and supported legislation that included requiring licensing for child care centers, admitting women to jury duty, maternity leave for teachers and continued to advocate for equal pay. Her tireless efforts on behalf of women in our great state are both humbling and inspirational.

In her spirit of advocacy, we must find a way to address the unpleasant topic of sexual harassment. We have been inundated with news of widespread sexual harassment and assault. Regardless of profession, women are subjected to inappropriate comments and behaviors, pressured for sexual favors for advancement and even blackballed. It is appalling we live in a day and age where this still happens, and upsetting that women have stayed quiet so long. What is even more devastating, is this behavior has trickled down into middle and high schools.

The constant degradation of women on various forms of entertainment and social media had created an attitude where it is ok to touch girls and women without their permission and where there is only laughter and snickering for sexually charged comments about intentions and body parts. There is no remorse. This unhealthy learning environment can cause difficulty concentrating and girls would rather miss school than be subjected to the ongoing harassment.

My primary focus for our next term will be to create and pass the Back to Basics Respect Act targeting middle and high school students. Working with our Education and Health committees, this supplemental interactive program will cover topics including inappropriate comments, touching, threats, reporting harassment and how to confront such behaviors. Information will be disseminated through lecture, workshops, and role-play. Committees will pull and incorporate input from experts on sexual harassment and assault including victims, medical professionals, activists, and rehabilitated offenders to explain the consequences and impacts of committing sexual harassment crimes. Stopping assault and harassment at a young age is critical to preventing more impactful issues in the future.

I look forward to working with each of you. Thank you for your time ladies and gentlemen of the Senate.